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Self-securitising narratives versus reflexive conflict dynamics

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Abstract: Critical scholarship has warned against basing the prevention of terrorism on a concept of ‘radicalisation’ implying violence to be inherent in Islam, but various critical approaches disagree on how to base critique. This paper argues for reading counterradicalisation policies as narratives to identify their potential in terms of conflict escalation. Analysis of the official Danish counterradicalisation action plan, reactions to it, and reactions to the reactions finds that criticism from the targets of the policy and engaged scholars based on attention to conflict dynamics has had some success in modifying policy from securitising to governing risk. Nevertheless, potential for re-securitisation remains.

Keywords: securitisation; narrative; radicalisation; dialogue; the Muslim Other

Bio: Ulrik Pram Gad is a Post-Doctoral Researcher at the Department of Political Science, University of Copenhagen. Current research focuses on Muslims in Danish security organisations and on post-colonial sovereignty games in the Arctic. Publications include ‘Concepts of dialogue as counterterrorism. Narrating the self-reform of the Muslim Other’ in *Critical Studies on Terrorism* (2012); a double special issue of *Security Dialogue* on ‘The politics of Securitization’ (co-edited with K.L. Petersen 2011); and a review essay on the relations constructed between Islam and violence entitled ‘Dusting for Fingerprints’ in *Distinktion* (co-authored with M. Crone and M. Sheikh 2008).

Introduction

In the decade since the 9/11 terror attacks, Islam and Muslims have been associated with threat, violence and terrorism in Western security discourse. Particularly since the bombing of the London Underground on 7 July 2005, Western states have developed policies to prevent ‘radicalisation’ and, hence, ‘home-grown’ terrorism among Muslim migrants and converts. The stories told by government officials and in official policy present terrorism largely as a ‘Muslim problem’ – and leave Muslims with the impression that they are all more or less implicated in the problem.

Critical scholarship has warned against basing the prevention of terrorism on a concept of ‘radicalisation’ and against a series of specific policy tools which are legitimised by this conceptualisation – but various critical approaches disagree on how to base their criticism (cf. Gad and Petersen 2012). Human rights advocates have lamented that a number of rights are sacrificed in the efforts to prevent radicalisation. Various strands of normative political and legal theory have argued that basic democratic rights and mechanisms are undermined in order to save democracy from the terrorist threat. Post-structural analysis has described how previously existing mechanisms for disciplining and governing have been combined and enhanced to tighten the space of acceptable behaviour. However well-conceived, widespread and high-pitched these criticisms have been, they have had only modest success in rolling the policy measures back, but nevertheless some success in modifying and recalibrating them.

This paper argues for basing policy advice on insight concerning the potential and actualised conflict escalatory effects stemming from how the counterradicalisation policies are constructed. Specifically, the paper argues that such insight may come from analytically reading both the counterradicalisation policies and reactions to them as

security narratives. To demonstrate how the analytical strategy is fruitful in terms of producing both empirical conclusions and policy advice, the paper analyses the security narratives presented in the Danish government's *Action Plan to Prevent Extremist Views and Radicalization* (Government 2009), in the reactions to this plan and the further development of its constituent policies. Before the paper proceeds to empirical analysis, the analytical focus on security narratives is introduced as an alternative to analysing securitisation as speech acts and as inscription in discourse. As part of this theoretical introduction, the paper explains why the analysis focuses on narratives promoting 'dialogue' as a means to counter the threat from radicalisation.

Security as a social construction – yes, but how?

Policies aimed at preventing radicalisation have been introduced as measures to avert threats, the basic rationale being that a group of individuals in society might turn into terrorists unless we intervene and prevent their radicalisation. In this sense, the policies have been presented as security measures on behalf of society – and critical approaches would agree to this label: radicalisation prevention policies represent instances of security politics. However, critical approaches would not agree with the diagnosis of the problem or with (all of) the prescribed measures involved in the radicalisation prevention policies. The analytical basis for why and how critical approaches disagree with the radicalisation prevention policies may, however, make a difference. First, it may make a difference in relation to the substance of the criticism: Some points of departure single out some measures for contestation – other points of departure single out other measures. But more pertinently, the basis for critique may make a difference in terms of the chance of having an impact on the future re-formulation of the policies. More specifically, a critique assuming the form of an appeal to universal human rights may not have impact on a nationalist discourse valuing the survival of the nation over

the well-being of non-nationals. If this is the discursive landscape in which analysis is to intervene, internal criticism might be more efficient; criticism pointing out that the policy is self-defeating and likely to produce the very situation it seeks to avert.

According to the Copenhagen School of security studies, 'security problems' are the results of *securitisation*: A securitisation involves the solution of a problem being presented as urgent and indispensable – ideal typically as the result of a speech act – and that extraordinary measures are legitimised as the problem involves an existential threat to something valued (the 'referent object'). In this perspective, securitisation is successful when the application of extraordinary means to avert a threat is accepted by relevant audiences (Wæver 1995, Buzan et al. 1998). Traditionally, state sovereignty has been the typical referent object, and the extraordinary means have been military, security services, states of emergency and so forth. The Copenhagen School devised a framework which allows the structured analysis of the logic of security across an expanded field: relevant audiences may accept the use of the rhetorical figure (existential threat + referent object + extraordinary means) in other circumstances, with other referent objects than 'the state as such'. Threats may thus be described as aimed at 'the nation', 'the economy', 'the climate' and so on.

When focusing this article on the securitisation of Muslims, one might imagine Muslims identified as a threat in a lot of different ways. As a traditional security threat, one would imagine the Turkish army at the gates of Vienna or (when threatening Denmark:) by the obsolete border post where the highway crosses into Jutland from Germany. Employing a broader concept of security, one might also find Muslims accused of threatening a variety of elements central to Danish identity.

Parallel to this, the means presented to avert each specific threat may vary. Muslims may be inscribed into a traditional security discourse evolving around the

defence of the physical border, clandestine services, restriction of civil liberties and (as a last resort:) physical violence. But other means for the aversion of the threat may also be pointed out, including cultural rearmament and reformed welfare legislation, means which may not count as extraordinary in any meaningful sense of the word when viewed in isolation. When actual analysis is to be conducted, hence, the question of what renders a means extraordinary is complicated: What if the extraordinary is institutionalised? Might it still count as extraordinary (cf. Buzan et al. 1998, p. 24)? And what if there are rules for when rule-breaking is allowed (cf. Werner 1998, pp. 5ff)? A focus on securitisation as speech acts leaves much analytical purchase on a distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary, which is highly context-dependent.

Taking the opposite approach and focusing on how the ordinary way of doing politics is constituted by what is lifted out of the ordinary by means of securitisation might therefore be of more practical analytical use (Huysmans 2006: ch.8). If so, the next question becomes how far one can stretch the Copenhagen School's criterion (that means be extraordinary for a securitisation to have taken place) before articulating a problem as a security problem no longer makes sense. One answer to this question follows from Huysman's analysis of migration and asylum as a security problem in the EU (2006, ch.5). His analysis illustrates the complexity of the situation: Firstly, more than one threat involving migrants is narrated: An initial threat to 'internal security' is identified; a second threat to the welfare state is pointed out; and a third threat is pointed out to cultural identity. Secondly, it is not the migrant as such who is identified as the threat in any of these threat constructions: it is, first, the terrorist and criminal hiding amongst the migrants crossing the borders who are pointed out as threats; second, the willingness and abilities of the migrant to contribute to the economy; and third, the cultural habitus of the migrant. Thirdly, none of these threats is necessarily accepted as

acutely existential in isolation; nevertheless, the migrant – fourthly – ends up *inscribed in a discourse of (in)security*; partly due to all of the various threats being articulated in relation to migration:

[I]mmigration and asylum ... are not a single category identifying a single force that threatens survival of a political community, whether defined in terms of identity or sovereignty. They exist more as floating signifiers that have been inscribed with connotations of danger, unease and fear that can refer to different groups of people ... and different social dynamics related to migration and asylum (Huysmans 2006, p. 83).

Migration is furthermore inscribed in this discourse of insecurity in terms of how the individual threats are linked in how they distribute fear and trust; how they administer inclusion and exclusion; and how they are predisposing for violence legitimised by the need to defend the referent object (Huysmans 2006, p. 51). So being identified as a direct threat is only one way of becoming a security problem; inscription in a broader discourse of (in)security by a series of practical techniques of government (Huysmans 2006, pp. 2–9) is another way of becoming the target of extraordinary means.ⁱ The lack of criteria for what constitutes a securitisation implied in analysing securitisation as ‘inscription’ in security discourse may, however, mean watering down the concept of ‘security’ *and* potentially an analytical securitisation of next-to-everything (Wæver 2011).

This article agrees with the Copenhagen School that securityness is not an inherent quality of a problem – it is the result of a process of social construction; of securitisation. The article also agrees with Huysmans that an articulation of threats presented as coming from (Muslim) migrants may add up to a security discourse. But the reason why the article finds the official Danish counterradicalisation discourse to be (potentially) securitising does not coincide with Huysmans’ analysis of the EU policies

on migration. The argument in this article is that the analysis needs to put the *dynamics* of discursive interaction into focus to adequately account for the securitisation of Muslims. Such a focus may fruitfully be produced by employing ‘security narrative’ as an analytical lens – as a supplement rather than an alternative to securitisation as speech act and discursive inscription.

Focusing on the specific dynamics of security interaction is not new. A classical point in IR security theory is that threats to the defence of sovereignty may give rise to ‘security dilemmas’ in which the one party takes action to secure itself – but the defensive actions are perceived as threatening by the other party, which must then secure itself – which the first party perceives as a threat, and so on (Herz 1950). When the Copenhagen School conceptualises these dynamics, however, the dynamics are analytically ‘frozen’ and become a static snapshot of the relation: The Copenhagen School describes ‘constellations’ of securitisations which are mutually opposed (or otherwise related) (Buzan et al. 1998, Buzan and Wæver 2009). By analysing a diachronic dynamic in a way which turns it into a static structure, the Copenhagen School loses information regarding the conditions of escalation and de-escalation. To obtain such information – and thereby make it possible to contribute directly to conflict management – analysis focusing on ‘security narratives’ is more fruitful.

Reading counterradicalisation policies as interacting security narratives

This paper analyses both the counterradicalisation policies of the Danish government and reactions to them as *narratives*. Reading policies as narratives focuses the analysis on how the policies invite reactions – and the analysis thus points to diachronic discursive dynamics. To see exactly how and why, we need to step back and depart from the intimate security–identity relationship.

Identity exists only in discourse; only as part of the construction of meaning. In philosophical terms, a radical Other is that which prevents you from being the one you ought to be; from being identical to yourself. Philosophically speaking, there is always another Other – even another radical Other – since identity as a concept implies that any change, any difference, any impurity can be conceived as posing a threat to identity. In other words, identity is always threatened and therefore never quite realised – it is always something of the future and ultimately impossible. Securitisation, hence, always implies an existential threat to – but simultaneously the sedimentation of – an identity (Wæver 1997, pp. 328–329).

Existential threats must be handled if you are in charge (Wæver 1995). You need to tell how you want to fight off the existential threats against the entity you represent; that is, you need to tell a plausible *security policy narrative*. So the identity which is nevertheless there and has effects – in the face of its own philosophical impossibility – is narrative: ‘Individual and community are constituted in their identity by taking up narratives that become for them their actual history’ (Ricoeur 1988, p. 247). A narrative basically consists of the selection and articulation of a series of events from a beginning to a conclusion (Ricoeur 1988, pp. 41, 66). In other words, to know who we are – and to be sure that we are identical with ourselves – we tell stories. And as you cannot tell stories only about yourself, a cast of characters is required. Even the most simple story involves not just a Self and an Other – threatening or not – but a varied cast of ‘characters’ (Ricoeur 1988, p. 248). An entire series of roles is presented for Others – and Self – to take up in the narrative attempts to maintain identity. Identity is performed through suggestions on what we ought to do in relation to others in the future; that is, through the formulation of policy stories.

A crucial feature makes a narrative analytic particularly apt at focusing on discursive dynamics: Narrative as a discursive structure – and speech act – awards each of the characters casted the capacity to co-author or negotiate the continuation of the narratives. When the floor is yours, you may use it to say something unexpected – even if the risk implied in (and consequences of) leaving the script may be more or less dramatic (Butler 1997, p. 133). However, the description of the roles ‘others’ are expected to play may leave more or less room for improvisation: Bearing in mind how the etymology of the word ‘dialogue’ – from the Greek δια’ (‘across/inter-’) and λογος (‘speech’) – suggests two-way interaction between two or more distinct entities, the immediate impression of a narrative inviting an Other to enter into *dialogue* would be that the role awarded involves rather great freedom to continue the narrative at will.

No matter how tightly their roles are circumscribed, the characters in the narrative may avail themselves of the measure of agency awarded to them to continue the narrative in their preferred way – leading either to a confirmation of the original narrative or increased conflict. The first potential result of having more than one author of a story is conflict, the second is that the conflict radicalises to involve threats and violence. If a specific group of people is identified as preventing the Self from being what it ought to be, that Other is identified as a security threat; it is, in other words, securitised (Wæver 1997, pp. 311-3). In this case, the Other is not merely constructed as different from the Self but pointed out as an existential threat to the identity of the Self (Connolly 1991, p. 8).

A securitised position is not an easy one from which to play a part as a co-author of the continuation of the narrative. One option is, of course, willingly to confirm the assigned role as a threat. The opposite option – to tell a continuation of the story leading out of the securitised position – may be next to impossible. Whatever the Other replies

to continue the narrative in a de-escalating manner may very well be discounted by the initial securitiser, because if the Other is deemed an existential threat, they are probably just out to deceive us.

Once promoted and accepted, security narratives therefore often *revolve* rather than *evolve*. To contribute to their dissolution, both the analyst and parties must have a clear idea of these dynamics being necessary (cf. Galtung 1978). This article therefore reads *both* government policies on how to counter terrorism *and* reactions to these policies as narratives about Self and Other. Or to be precise: as *security narratives* about what Self needs to do to Other to protect Self from Other. For the purpose of providing an analytical strategy, a security narrative may be characterised in three ways. First, it poses a Self in relation to one or more Others: one Other is presented as radically threatening – and other, less-than-radical Others are inscribed in the narrative to help defend the Self. Second, the narrative involves a passing of time and a (potential) change in the relations between Self and Others. Third, as part of their narration, the others are awarded a measure of agency to participate in the co-narration of the continuation of the narrative. The analysis covers three turns taken in narrating dialogue as a relation between Danish authorities and ‘Muslims’: first, the counterradicalisation *Action Plan* as developed under the centre-right government;ⁱⁱ second, ‘Muslim’ reactions to their casting in the *Action Plan*, as empirically investigated by Kühle and Lindekilde (2009); and finally, in the reframing and operationalisation of the *Action Plan* under the new centre-left government in a series of practical handbooks for street level bureaucrats (Ministry 2011a–b, 2012a–c). Specifically, this analysis zooms in on the narratives of *dialogue* to untangle the paradoxical relationship between dialogue (opening a space for the Other) and security (closing down dialogue to fight the Other).

Concepts of dialogue and dynamics of securitisation

Invitations to dialogue in the narratives of the Action Plan

After the 2005 bombing of the London underground, the Danish government increasingly extended its narratives on how to counter terrorism so as to include the so-called ‘home-grown’ terrorists (Ministeriet 2008, p. 16, PET 2008, p. 7) as well as those from abroad. As part of efforts to limit this undesired growth, a comprehensive Danish counterradicalisation *Action Plan* was formulated in 2008–09, and ‘dialogue’ was promoted in a series of instances as part of a broad spectrum of measures. Analysed as narratives, however, the *Action Plan* employs a series of different concepts of dialogue.

First, upon closer inspection, most of the self-designated ‘dialogues’ which the government invites Muslims into in order to counter radicalisation are actually monologues. The word ‘dialogue’ is often accompanied by ‘enlightenment’, denoting a one-way transfer of informationⁱⁱⁱ – and the ‘dialogue’ label is void or crowded out by ‘enlightenment’ (Ministeriet 2008, pp. 34, 35, 37, 57; Government 2009, pp. 11–17; cf. Gad 2012: 8). In other instances, two-way dialogue is indeed envisioned somewhere beyond the horizon – but the immediate policy remains monological: Before the Other can enter into a two-way dialogue, they must qualify by acquiring a number of characteristics and competencies which the invitor values and embodies (Ministeriet 2008, pp. 43, 45–46, Gad 2012, p. 8). These listen-to-qualify dialogues lead to a second category of ‘dialogues’ which serve to include the Other in the Self. As the aim of such a dialogue is the inclusion of the Other in a community capable of dialoguing, a dialogue of this kind aims at dissolving itself as a dialogue: If successful, there can no longer be an interchange between two or more distinct entities since there *are* no longer two distinct entities due to the erasing of the initial difference over which dialogue was taking place (Gad 2012, pp. 8–10). Finally, however, a residual category of dialogues is

presented as ‘disagreeing dialogues’ – signalling that, in these cases, the ‘dialogue’ will actually run two ways (Gad 2012, pp. 10–11). There are, after all, some instances in which the government accepts the expression of dissent, but that does not necessarily mean that what is voiced should be heard or that the narratives project the outcome of even ‘disagreeing dialogues’ to be anything but the possibility of moving on to the next item on the agenda. This will become clear as we turn to the reactions to the *Action Plan* and the subsequent reactions to the reactions.

Reactions to the invitations of the Action Plan: defence and counteridentity

So far, the analysis could have been conducted with either a focus on securitisation as a speech act or a focus on securitisation as an inscription in a discourse of security. Both analytical strategies collapse a diachronic series of utterances into a single synchronic structure, that is, the structure of the particular rhetorical figure of securitisation (threat + referent object + means to aversion) or the structure of a discourse of insecurity (organising the dispersion of utterances articulating threats, defensive means and insecurity in a regular manner). An analytical strategy focusing on how discourses are narratively structured opens the discourses analysed up to the agency of the Others constructed as part of the narratives; it highlights how the original narrative projects futures, including how the other may re-narrate the continuation of the narrative. We now turn the analysis to such continuations of the government narratives: first, to the continuations demanded by both the parliamentary basis of the centre-right government and by its own overall narrative on the Muslim Other; second, to the reactions by the Muslims invited into dialogue; and finally, to the reactions to the Muslim reactions.

A first reaction to the inclusion of narratives of ‘dialogues proper’ is already visible in the texts of the *Action Plan* – both in the initial civil servant draft (Ministeriet 2008) and even more in the final version accepted by the government (Government 2009). Already during the drafting and negotiation of the text, the inclusion of narratives of two-way dialogues triggered a need to monitor the limits of dialogue, because the basic government narrative of integration was that Danish identity should be defended from the Other: ‘Should I – in the street – encounter an extremist, who would like to engage me in dialogue, I would define dialogue in such a way that I would be wearing the trousers’ (Hornbech in Bangsgaard 2009).^{iv} The Danish Self was presented in the government narratives as embodying qualities which are to be protected against change – any opening to Others will therefore only compromise the identity of the Self (Gad 2012, pp. 13–15). Merely recognising the Other might compromise the objectives of the dialogue – so the two-way dialogues must be non-recognising dialogues:

The problem is that we are so used to discussion in Denmark that we know that when we talk to everybody it does not involve legitimization. But people not used to this are coming from other forms of government. And unfortunately, one has to stress to certain groups that we do not legitimize you; we will not be abused by you, because we live in a free country where we speak about everybody. That’s what dialogue is all about. (Hornbech in Bangsgaard 2009)

Hence, the government must control the limits as to what input may come out of the supplementary policy of dialogue: It needs to limit the agenda of dialogues from including reforms of the Self; it needs to limit the difference of those invited to dialogue; it needs to monitor the limits; and it needs to enforce transparency on the part of the Other to be able to monitor the limits of difference (Ministeriet 2008, pp. 12, 18, 30, 38, 52, Government 2009, p. 17; Gad 2012, pp. 11–13).

These measures installed to monitor the limits of dialogue make it clear – not least to the less-than-radicalised Muslims invited to dialogue – that invitations are only issued because the invitees are seen as potentially radicalised or at least because of their special connections to the radical Other: the terrorist (Gad 2012, pp. 15–16). Even if the government does not explicitly identify Muslims as an existential threat, Muslims are nevertheless implicated in a security narrative as threatening. Ghassan Hage (2008) has theorised how such convoluted invitations possibly trigger counter-identities in an analysis of the limits to multiculturalism as a form of governmentality. Hage describes how contemporary nationalist narratives award what appears to be an equal role to the alien. It might be a ‘multiculturalist’ role, which on the face of things appears equal. Otherwise, it might be a role in an ‘integration process’ which places equality at the end of an adjustment process. Here, however, a problem may arise as the alien happily accepts and assumes their role – only to be refused: ‘The role wasn’t meant like that – it wasn’t meant to be played like that or by someone like you’. Perhaps one more demand was added to the list of what it takes to be ‘well-integrated’. This type of ‘mis-interpellation’, writes Hage, gives rise to a sense of being marginalised within a community, a sense of disappointment with the community one thought one belonged to (2008, pp. 503–504). When the ‘well-integrated’ Muslim discovers that their way of playing the role is questioned, the result may be ‘assimilation or recognition fatigue’ in which an identity as a ‘seriously religious Muslim’ – Hage’s label for Muslims who insist that the space for Islam must in principle be unlimited – may appear to present an attractive alternative (2008, pp. 505–508, cf. Gad 2011).

At the height of the political debates on the *Action Plan*, Lene Kühle and Lasse Lindekilde conducted field work among young Muslims in an ‘Islamic activist milieu ... considered to be “radical”’ (Kühle and Lindekilde 2009, pp.10, 12). The reactions

found among a group of people who were evidently cast as potential targets of the planned action, first, confirm Hage's prognosis regarding 'fatigue': a recurring reaction is that the targets become 'tired' (Kühle and Lindekilde 2009, pp. 131–132, cf. Lindekilde 119–120) when confronted with the lack of nuance – particularly the lack of distinctions between various strands of 'serious', to use Hage's conceptualisation, versions of Islam – whereby all Muslims come under suspicion. Second, the narratives beyond fatigue told by interview persons continued with further alienation from mainstream Denmark rather than renewed efforts to assimilate (Lindekilde 2012, pp. 120–121). Third, the monitoring required to control the limits of acceptable difference – specifically, the idea of crime prevention workers being given check lists with physical signs of radicalisation – was found to be offensive (Lindekilde 2012, p. 121; Kühle and Lindekilde 2009, p. 134). Fourth, a number of the interview persons were very attentive to the assimilatory aims of even those narratives of dialogue which are presented as symmetric (cf. Lindekilde 2012, p. 122). Finally, the informants warned – in terms resonating with conflict theory (cf. Galtung 1978) – that the possibility of a middle ground was shrinking as a consequence of a polarising context: the lack of nuance in Danish political and media discourse on Muslims made it burdensome for orthodox voices to employ theological arguments against violence in public (Lindekilde 2012, pp. 122–123, cf. Lindekilde 2009, p. 144).

Reactions to reactions: 'going stealth' on securitisation and Islamism

So some Muslims casted as potentially radicalised by the counterradicalisation narratives of the 2008–09 *Action Plan* have indeed understood its invitations to dialogue as staging not two-way dialogues but rather one-way monologues – or as invitations to inclusion on assimilatory terms which they are not willing to, and perhaps not even expected to be able to, live up to. Met by the counter-identity-based continuations to the

official counterterrorism narratives theorised by Hage and found empirically by Kühle and Lindekilde, the most obvious path for Danish discourse on national identity and on the integration of Muslims to continue *its* narrative in turn would be a further securitisation. Danish identity discourse has, however, *not* proceeded by insisting on accelerating the spiralling conflict. A number of more or less related elements in this de-escalation can be identified – ranging from changes in national discursive landscape, via bureaucratic politics and procedures, to activist expertise.

First, in late 2011, Denmark had a new centre-left government. In terms of substance, it has continued most of the immigration and integration policies inherited from the centre-right government.^v But – aided by the rise on the agenda of the global economic crisis – the new government has ‘gone stealth’ on both immigration and radicalisation.^{vi} The Ministry for Refugees, Migrants and Integration established by the centre-right government was dissolved – and its Office for Democratic Community and the Prevention of Radicalization was transferred to the Ministry of Social Affairs, where it was renamed the ‘Democracy Office’ and its original *raison d’être* (prevention of radicalisation) was relegated to the very end of a long list of inclusive tasks such as ‘active citizenship’, ‘integration of new citizens’ and ‘equal ethnic treatment’ (Ministry n.d.).

Second, as the counterradicalisation *Action Plan* has left the political sphere and gone to be operationalised in bureaucratic everyday life, the concepts of radicalisation and Islamism have been toned down, while dialogue has been toned up: ‘Radicalization’ is no longer the entry at the homepage of the Ministry and ‘terrorism’ is gone entirely – instead, it is ‘extremist and anti-democratic forces’ which have to be fought; fought, not least, in a rhetorical battle: ‘In a democratic society such as Denmark, there is room for having and expressing very strong opinions about society. However, one also has to

expect to be contradicted by others' (Ministry n.d.). Moreover, the primary referent object of the extremist threat is no longer Denmark but the very persons in danger of being radicalised: 'The Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration works to prevent the violence, lacking well-being and other negative circumstances which may be found in relation to extremism' (Social- og Integrationsministeriet n.d.). Finally, 'Islamism' is now rather consistently nuanced (by distinguishing between ideological currents which are 'anti-democratic and violent', currents which are only 'anti-democratic' and yet others which are neither) and normalised by always appearing in connection with (non-religious) 'right-wing' and 'left-wing extremism' (cf., i.a., Ministry 2012a).

Third, when a substantial number of the elements in the *Action Plan* went from the desk to real life implementation, they landed in the laps of the local crime prevention team (abbreviated *SSP* in Danish: school, social services and police).^{vii} Here, the focus is on the 'personal welfare problems, social marginalization, vandalism and violence' (Ministry 2011b: 5) in relation to which 'radicalization [is a] risk-behaviour alongside other forms of worrying behaviour, such as truancy, shoplifting and disruptive behaviour' (Ministry 2011b: 8). On its way to the to-do list of the crime prevention workers, the radicalization prevention task was quickly translated to their standard operating procedures (Ministry 2012b: 16). In these standard operating procedures, dialogue and mentoring play a crucial role. A series of practical handbooks for street level bureaucrats (Ministry 2011a–b, 2012a–c) essentially describes mentoring as a practice consisting of establishing a dialogue (Ministry 2012c: 8–12): by facilitating through 'openmindedness', 'appreciation' and 'empathy' the creation of 'safe surroundings' in which the mentor 'motivates a process of change' by focusing on 'the youth's personal resources' (Ministry 2012c, p. 8). Prominent among other tools, the handbook series recommends the use of 'mirroring dialogue' as a tool in which

the young person's actions are articulated by describing observations and experiences ... subsequently, [the mentor] ask[s] the young person how they perceive the situation. In this way, it is possible to voice thoughts and observations honestly while at the same time recognizing and showing respect for the young person (Ministry 2011a, p. 14).

Fourth, Denmark took the lead in the EU's efforts to base de-radicalisation policies on 'knowledge and research'. Parts of the research made possible by the funding provided by the European Commission were outsourced to independent researchers, who took the opportunity to add a crash course in conflict theory to the practitioners' guide (Ministry 2011a, Jakobsen and Jensen 2011). As part of a series of examples of how cases of individual and collective radicalisation have been handled, the handbook advises that street level bureaucrats should

Talk openly about attempts to create division. Intolerance breeds intolerance. If groups with different ideologies take the local community hostage and try to create division, it is important to ... engage in dialogue to build bridges rather than gaps. ... Include those who seek confrontation ... insisting on contact and critical dialogue ... as far as possible, rather than excluding and rejecting the young people with extremist views. (Ministry 2011a, p. 36)^{viii}

Related advice is: 'Do not be judgmental' (Ministry 2011a, p. 36), since

labelling a young person 'radical' or 'extremist' involves the risk of pushing the youth further away ... the concepts as such [appear] escalating, and therefore it is not possible to apply them as part of an inclusive approach ... [and] exclusion and marginalization as such [appear] to be radicalizing (Jakobsen and Jensen 2011, pp. 6–7).

Further, an insight based in youth psychology in potential escalatory conflict dynamics is obvious in the advice to 'enter into dialogue with the young people ... without showing too much concern about the activities of the Islamist movement, given that this would most likely increase its attraction to the young people' (Ministry 2011a, pp.

30–31). The list of ‘worrying signs’ to look out for in an individual – summing up to a definition of radicalisation - sounds as if it was taken from the ‘how not to’ section of a conflict theory textbook:

The young person [i.a.] expresses intolerance ... and seeks to impose their convictions on others ... is preoccupied with ... enemy images ... advocates ‘absolute solutions’ ... is isolated ... has severed their relations to existing friends ... [has p]oor competencies in relation to problem solving, reasoning and reflection. (Ministry 2012b, pp. 28–29, 32)^{ix}

Or in other words: The potentially radicalised is polarising, hateful, detaching and not reflecting. The solution is exactly the opposite: After ‘Establishing the first contact’ (Ministry 2012c, p. 12), the task is to ‘establish a dialogue’ (Ministry 2012b, p. 30) in order to help ‘the young person ... to experience an inner moral struggle’ (Ministry 2012c, p. 19),^x thereby establishing ‘more nuanced narratives of the world and ... dissociating from the old black-and-white conceptions of life and its challenges’ (Ministry 2012c, p. 20). Dialogue, in other words, is both means and end on a series of levels: Dialogue (as opposed to detachment) offers the means to establish a competence for inner dialogue (as opposed to polarisation), which is a prerequisite for inclusion in a dialogical society (as opposed to fighting for pure essence).

Still Islam, still hierarchy – and still security?

In a number of ways, then, the narratives currently told in Danish counterradicalisation policies and initiatives appear less prone to escalate conflict than just a couple of years ago. But then again: the narratives still involve some of the conflict triggers known from the 2008–09 basic publications, even if they are not positioned as prominently as was previously the case. Furthermore, a number of the ways in which the less confrontational narratives are constructed still involve hierarchical relations, even if

they are carefully convoluted to camouflage themselves:

First, even if violently antidemocratic Islamism is routinely sandwiched between left- and right-wing extremism, Islamist extremism remains casted as qualitatively and quantitatively different. The local examples of counterradicalisation in the handbook explain the fact that it mostly contains examples of Islamist extremism and does not necessarily prove that this kind is the most prevalent (Ministry 2011a, p. 5). But the qualitative difference of Islam as a religion and ‘Muslim’ culture(s) makes it necessary to employ ‘Muslim competence’ to establish dialogue with potentially or actually radicalised Muslims: ‘Use bicultural skills. It is often easier for people with the same cultural background as the person in question to understand that person’s motivations and to engage in dialogue’ (Ministry 2011a, p. 19, cf. 2011a, pp. 10, 15, 20–21, 41).

Second, even if central political discourse on counterradicalisation has ‘gone stealth’ on radicalisation and the operationalisation of the *Action Plan* in the form of the handbook series is promoting dialogue – local texts and practices may still be formed by the securitising narratives of Muslims which were until recently forming national discourse. This may lead to overreaction and misplaced suspicion. The handbook series mentions an unfortunate case in which a

student had stated on Facebook that he would bomb his classroom. The student ... was described ... as a loner, as very religious and having extreme views ... The police ... arrested him and searched his home ... and [he] began to attend school less frequently. He was later thrown out of school due to truancy. (Ministry 2011a, p. 22)

The handbook takes the occasion to warn that ‘[a] massive effort or vehement response to a specific concern may enhance already existing feelings of discrimination and ... increase [already existing] anger against society’ (Ministry 2011a, p. 23). Again, the difference presented by Islam makes it ‘difficult for some [crime prevention] workers to

tell the difference between non-worrying religiosity and worrying radicalization’

(Jakobsen and Jensen 2011, p. 9). Or as a municipal chief of integration explains:

We would not have a chance to do a lot of this prevention of radicalization without the staff members with an ethnic minority background, because without them we would not be able to decode what’s going on. We cannot tell things apart and mix it all up. Is it something cultural, poor parenting or genuine radicalization?

(Jakobsen and Jensen 2011, p. 12)

But the role of the less-than-radical Other assisting the Danish authorities in determining the difference between the not-so-much-less-than-radical Other and the radical Other is problematic, as some local crime prevention workers question the loyalty of their Muslim colleagues – either because they ‘suspect that they ... neglect a worrying behaviour in order not to contribute to mistrust against Islam and Muslims’ or even for ‘having contributed with what the interviewee considered extremist attitudes’ (Jakobsen and Jensen 2011, p. 13).

Third, when zooming in on the specific narratives promoted in the handbook series, the concept of dialogue is hierarchical in most cases in the sense that it implies a predefined goal for the dialogue:

to bring about changes in the young person’s life situation, including preventing a possible radicalisation or supporting a disengagement from extremism ... the following may, for instance be considered ... Relational work and mentoring.
(Ministry 2012b, p. 38–39)

Actually, most of the handbook series’ descriptions of and prescriptions for both the individual mentoring process and collective dialogues are instructions in how to stage a two-way dialogue as a first step towards getting the dialogue partner to accept the predefined goal of leaving extremism behind or at least renouncing violence: ‘Do not tackle the youth head-on. Try to establish some rapport through small talk on subjects

that you are both interested in. Listen, and let the youth talk as much as possible. Ask open-ended rather than closed-ended questions' (Ministry 2012c, p. 12). The 'how to convolute the hierarchy of dialogue to let dialogue happen' narratives in the handbook series (written to facilitate street level bureaucrats in preventing extremism) stand in some contrast to the narratives in the *Action Plan* (written to be accepted by the centre-right government and to convince the public that the government has a plan to secure it against radicalisation): The *Action Plan* did mention the need to be forthcoming when issuing invitations to partners in dialogue (2009, pp. 37, 39, cf. Gad 2012, p. 9) – overall, however, the *Action Plan* was very keen on stressing the common aim as a precondition for entering into dialogue (2008, pp. 34–35, cf. Gad 2012, p. 9).

Fourth, the way terrorism prevention efforts are fused with the local crime prevention workers' standard operating procedures involving dialogue and mentoring may add to a neo-liberal governmentality technique (Lindekilde 2012, cf. Karlsen and Villadsen 2008). The handbook series openly admits that it suggests a 'range of methods ... whose effects have been tested and assessed, especially in relation to crime prevention, abuse and similar types of risk behaviour, but [sic -/upg] only to a very limited extent in relation to the prevention of extremism' (Ministry 2012b, p. 16). What was a security problem in the government's public narratives (terrorism as an existential threat to Danish peace, lives and identity, legitimising extraordinary means) becomes a risk to be managed in the practice of local crime prevention workers.^{xi} On the one hand, the casting as a risk-to-be-managed is very different from the casting as a threat-to-be-dealt-with: The obvious continuation of the *Action Plan's* security narratives – casting Muslims as potential threats – would be that some of them realise their potential and must therefore be turned into targets for extraordinary means. The obvious continuation of the risk narrative in the handbook series casting Muslims as being at risk of falling

prey to extremism is to send street level crime prevention workers out to mentor them to minimise the risk. In that sense, then, the diffuse inscription of Muslims into an insecurity discourse by techniques of government – as Huysmans depicts – is still not a nice position to be in, but it is not as immediately alarming as the position as an existential threat, which is the analytical option available according to securitisation theory à la Wæver. On the other hand, when analysed as a continuation of narratives, the conflict-escalating dynamics may be similar: Lindekilde (2012, p. 122) finds that the mentoring and role model techniques at the core of the crime prevention approach to radicalisation are exactly what triggers the most fierce resentment. Protesting this casting is difficult and may very well escalate conflict and trigger new securitisations. Nevertheless, the more diffuse inscription in a discourse of insecurity may leave more space and time for telling more complicated counter-narratives; not least narratives laying out the possible conflict dynamics which are potentially triggered by the initial, official stories. Indeed, aided by the academics conveying and constructing them, such stories seem to have had an effect on the authorities.

Narratives saved from self-securitisation

The analysis above has a number of implications. On a methodological level, the analysis highlights the importance of analysing the variation in empirical material when carrying out security analysis: By following the paper trail from bureaucratic texts negotiating academic research against political expectations via lofty declarations on the parliamentary pulpit and angry exchanges in the media to the instructions informing the practice of street level bureaucrats, the analysis can lay out both how narratives are reconfigured by being told within the confines of new genres and how a re-narration of the narratives takes place over time, incorporating reactions to earlier versions.

Particularly crucial when portraying the conflict dynamic laid out in this analysis was

the possibility to include (via secondary sources) interviews with individuals (Islamist activists) who were cast in threatening roles by the official narratives – and thereby inscribed as parties to a conflict – but whose narratives are never available in official texts and rarely in media texts.

For ethically concerned academics, the analysis presents an optimistic message: You can never be sure that it is too late to improve bad policy. The original civil servants' draft of the *Action Plan* drew on one strand of academic studies for its concept of radicalisation.^{xii} This concept was, first, directly criticised in empirically based scholarship, both for its empirical inadequacy and its potentially adverse policy implications (Kühle and Lindekilde 2009, Lindekilde 2010). This scholarship was, thus, able to break free of the political intentions behind the research grant funding it. At the request of the nationalist Danish People's Party, the grant was included directly in the state budget, beyond the normal 'arms' length' procedures, more or less explicitly in order to establish the link between Islam as a religion and violence (Crone et al. 2008, p. 190). Kühle and Lindekilde (2009, p. 77) advise that distinctions should be made when defining radicalisation: first, between support to defensive violence in war-like situations in Muslim countries and violence against civilians in non-Muslim countries; and second, between undemocratic (individual) behaviour and active agency to subvert democracy.^{xiii} The critique concerning the lack of nuance in the definition of radicalisation seems to have been accepted in recent communication regarding the official narratives on counterradicalisation. Second, as mentioned above, the outsourcing of research and formulation of parts of the *handbook series* to external researchers has meant increased attention to potential conflict dynamics in the narratives presented to the street level bureaucrats (cf. particularly Ministry 2011a).

The analysis also carries messages for the Western political counterterrorism strategy on the 'home front': On the one hand, talking loudly about threats and the importance of fighting them may ultimately aggravate the threat: if those narrated into threatening roles find themselves threatened, some might end up more prone to confirm the initial stories than they would have been if left alone. Or, in other words, securitisations often breed counter-securitisation; the result is a spiralling conflict. On the other hand, toning down urgency and explicit securitisation creates space for telling new, more nuanced stories – but even these stories might not defuse the conflict escalatory potential altogether: Even if the initial threat construction has gone stealth and measures to avert the threat are disguised in convoluted narratives, interwoven with pre-existing everyday bureaucratic routines, the roles constructed for 'less-than-radical Muslims' in these revised narratives may still provoke counter-identities – because they see through the convolutions and interpret the narratives with reference to broader narratives relating to Western 'Muslim relations'. One possible reason for protesting might be that some of the narratives – most notably those built into the mentoring schemes – were originally scripted for less resourceful targets (youth at risk of delinquency or drug abuse). Inclusion and dialogue are worthy aims and means for integration policy – but framing them as counterradicalisation might have limited their reach for years to come.

For Muslim identity politics, the policy advice suggested by the analysis necessarily mirrors the messages for the state and the majority population: Whether 'seriously religious', culturally or casually Muslim (or even agnostic and therefore entirely mis-interpellated even on the securitising narratives' own terms); any invitation to dialogue is an opportunity to protest casting, to promote nuanced narratives and to increase reflexivity. Unfortunately, a number of the Muslim voices most active in public

debates immediately after 2001 feel harassed out of the public sphere during the 2005–06 Mohammad cartoon controversy (Bahl 2010, cf. Lindekilde 2012, pp. 122–123, Lindekilde 2009, p. 144). In the relatively de-securitised context of 2012, perhaps it would be possible for them to return.

Conclusion: dialogue as a cue to making conflict dynamics self-reflexive

An analytical focus on security narratives facilitates policy advice on how to avoid escalating conflicts. Reading policies and reactions to them as narratives involves describing the space of agency allowing the Other to co-narrate the continuation of the narrative – and facilitates the prognosis of the reactions from the Self to the re-narrations: If as part of the narration the Other goes beyond the designated space of agency, escalation of conflict is imminent. However, the empirical analysis of the reactions and modifications of the Danish *Action Plan* shows that a crucial difference exists between actually *going* beyond the space of agency allowed and merely *pointing* beyond: The Muslims targeted by the anti-radicalisation efforts utilised the space of agency allowed in the Danish narratives not to confirm that they were radicalising but to protest the lack of nuance in the original narratives *and* to educate the authorities in basic conflict theory. Supported and amplified by academic researchers – and possibly aided by changes in general political conjuncture – the protests and education seem to have influenced both the official framing and practical implementation of the counter-radicalisation policies. The (fragile) narratives of two-way dialogue included in the original counterradicalisation *Action Plan* proved to be one cue for voices (Other and academic) engaging in these self-reflexive re-narrations seeking to defuse an escalatory conflict dynamic.

After the bureaucratic implementation, a narrative describing a threat to security to be urgently averted has been transformed into a narrative of a risk to be governed.

This immediately implies that a relative desecuritisation has taken place, reducing the urgency of countermeasures, thereby allowing time for stories of Muslim diversity and stories of conflict dynamics potentially facilitating further desecuritisation. Re-securitisation, however, remains an option: First, official narratives have not actively promoted a more nuanced set of roles for ‘seriously religious Muslims’ – only down-toned the link between Islam and violence previously narrated aggressively via the concept of ‘radicalisation’. Hence, these old narratives can be easily re-activated and might still be around below the official radar. Second, even if not explicitly and directly securitised, some among the ‘seriously religious’ target group of dialogues and mentoring schemes aiming to prevent radicalisation may still react to these governmentality techniques, not by playing the role as the liberal citizen narrated for them but by narrating counter-identities which can only be accounted for as threats in the next round of official narratives.

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ⁱ In such a broader perspective, the securitization of migrants in general (Ceyhan and Tsoukala 2002) and Muslims in particular (Aydin and Acikmese 2008, Kaya 2009) is undoubtedly widespread in the Western world.

ⁱⁱ Available are both a civil servant draft (Ministeriet 2008), which lends itself particularly well to narrative analysis as it explains and argues for a range of instruments, and a final version authorized by the government, which more or less is reduced to a list of initiatives (Regeringen 2009).

ⁱⁱⁱ Literally, ‘*oplysning*’ means ‘enlightenment’ but can also be translated ‘information’.

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- ^{iv} Literally, the Danish metaphor is even more definitive: ‘... I decide where the closet is to stand’.
- ^v When in opposition a central element – formulated more or less openly – in the strategy to win office was that the Social Democrats should never lag behind the centre-right government in terms of tightening immigration and integration laws, cf. the so called ‘Sass Doctrine’ named after a prominent Social Democrat (Krause-Kjær 2010).
- ^{vi} Assessing what is cause and effect is obviously difficult, but a survey of newspaper articles (both editorial material and letters to the editor) find that a number of buzzwords from the ‘debate on Muslims’ were used significantly less in 2011 than in any year since 2001 (Broberg and Kristensen 2012).
- ^{vii} The chronology of the narrative which this article constructs is somewhat strained since the integration of radicalization prevention work in the general crime prevention scheme in some municipalities predated the formulation of the official *Action Plan* (cf. Kühle and Lindekilde 2009, p. 8). The *Action Plan* in part found inspiration from these local efforts.
- ^{viii} Compare with this advice from Galtung: ‘do not polarize ... [but] keep in contact with the opponent rather than avoid it; try to establish a dialogue with him rather than isolating from him or fighting him. Try to stem the tide towards black–white thinking, rather than indulging in the luxury of the traditional and destructive conflict stereotype. Try to let conflicting images of reality, one from the antagonist and one from oneself, coexist in one’s mind – at least until further development leads to major revisions in the images’ (1978, p. 501).
- ^{ix} Cf. the characterisation of worrying groups in Jakobsen and Jensen (2011, p. 8).
- ^x The Danish version has what literally translates to ‘an inner discussion with himself’.
- ^{xi} Aradau and van Muster (2007) argue that terrorism prevention since 9/11 has formed a *dispositif* which has reconfigured risk management to include preemptive measures to avoid incalculable catastrophic risks. This might be so – and the task of telling the religiously orthodox from the potential terrorist definitively presents itself to the individual crime prevention worker as beyond the horizon of possible knowledge – but the way the *handbook series* presents the danger which is to be avoided has no catastrophic ring to it.
- ^{xii} Ministeriet (2008, p. 18) refers to a Dutch precedent (NCTb 2007, pp. 41–42) which relies for central parts on Wiktorowitz (2005, pp. 20–24, cf. Lindekilde and Kühle 2009, pp. 20–22). Likewise, the *handbook series* draws on scholarship on social work and social psychology for some of the specific tools and the underlying conceptualizations (2012c, pp. 10, 18).
- ^{xiii} The Danish Police Intelligence supports a similar distinction in public communication (PET 2008).